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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI TELLS THE HDAC THAT "DEMOCRACY IS
SACRED"

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) a
nd (d).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Saad Hariri told members of the House Democracy Assistance Commission that the establishment of the International Tribunal investigating the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and others would send a strong message throughout the Arab world. He warned that Syria is opposed to both the Tribunal and to Lebanese presidential elections. FPM leader General Michel Aoun is losing ground, and his supporters will eventually come over to the majority. He said the U.S. delegation should try to convince Syria that support for the Tribunal is a bipartisan issue in Lebanon, and that the Tribunal will send a strong message of support for Lebanese democracy. Finally, Hariri advised the delegation to tell the Lebanese opposition that "they must participate" and to tell General Aoun that "democracy is sacred." End Summary.

HARIRI POSITIVE ABOUT
THE VALUE OF TRIBUNAL

2. (C) Saad Hariri, Member of Parliament and leader of the Mustaqbal party, met on May 15 with members of the House Democracy Assistance Commission. The Ambassador, Econoff, and Congressional staff aides accompanied the delegation. Hariri thanked the members of Congress for their support, and for recently-delivered ammunition for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). He said the ammunition was particularly important, in light of the problems the LAF is facing in its efforts against extremists in the north of Lebanon. Hariri observed that with the wave of assassinations over the past two years, the Lebanese now find themselves living in very different times. (Note: During this period, four Members of Parliament were killed, one was injured in an attempted assassination, and the Minister of Defense was also wounded in another attempt.) Hariri believes that the Syrian regime is behind the attacks, bombs, and destabilization. He pointed out that the Syrians say that they had nothing to do with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, and blame Israel, but if that were the case, why would the Syrians be worried about the International Tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri assassination? The Lebanese are only interested in justice, after thirty years of oppression. The way to stop the violence is through the tribunal. The Syrians say, "The tribunal will de-stabilize Lebanon."

However, Hariri believes that on the contrary, the tribunal will send a message throughout the Arab world that Lebanon can succeed and achieve peace via democratic means.

CONTINUED WARNINGS ABOUT
THE DANGER OF SYRIA

13. (C) Lebanon has decided to fight for democracy, and is currently fighting that battle in Tripoli. Hariri said, "Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah says that we should not fight Fatah al-Islam", which to Hariri indicates that Nasrallah is speaking for Iran. Iran has a big role in the current turmoil, and not everything can be blamed on Syria. However, the leader of Fatah al-Islam is a convicted terrorist, implicated in the death of a USAID employee in Jordan, and imprisoned in Syria. Syria released him to go to Lebanon, which makes it obvious that Syria engages terrorists. In addition, Syria was responsible for the death of Rafiq Hariri. However, Hariri continued, he was among the first to ask PM Siniora to establish relations with Syria. According to Hariri, Bashar al-Asad was given every opportunity to bring Syria into the Arab mainstream when he took power. In taking over from his father at the same time Jordan's King Abdullah took over from his father, they had equal opportunities. "Look where Jordan is now," Hariri said with admiration. Assad, who unlike his father does not know when to back off, is taking every opportunity to interfere in Lebanon.

THE LEBANESE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS AND AOUN

13. (C) Turning to the fall presidential elections, Hariri
BEIRUT 00000757 002 OF 002

pointed out that even if the elections were held tomorrow, no one party would have the necessary two-thirds majority to prevail in Parliament with its candidate. Any elected president would need to have the support from other groups. Interestingly, in the recent elections among the Lebanese doctors' syndicate, the March 14 list won an overwhelming victory, with the support of 70% of the Christians and even 20% of the Shia. (Note: Elections within professional syndicates of this type usually reflect current public opinion in Lebanon, at least within that socio-economic stratum. End Note.) The doctors' outcome was obviously a disappointment for General Michel Aoun, who believes that his alliance with Hizballah is the only way he will achieve the presidency. In fact, Aoun is louder in support of Hizballah than Hizballah's own members; recently Aoun advocated that Hizballah should keep its weapons forever, a policy that even Hizballah does not embrace. (Note: Hariri pointed out that if the issue of Sheb'a Farms were to be resolved, there would be consensus to ask Hizballah to disarm. End Note.) Hariri also pointed out that when Aoun was Prime Minister, prior to the first Gulf War, he sided with Saddam Hussein. It is impossible to negotiate with Aoun, but after the elections, Hariri believes it will be possible for Aoun's supporters to join the majority. "We talk to them and we know that they don't all believe whatever Aoun says." Hariri thinks that many of Aoun's supporters are afraid of defecting now, but after the election most Christians will support the new president. The March 14 bloc is the only grouping with supporters from all sects: Sunni, Christian, Druse, and Shia.

WHAT SHOULD THE U.S. MESSAGE BE?

14. (C) Hariri talked about possible pitfalls ahead for Lebanon. The upcoming presidential elections present one such problem. He hoped that Lebanon would not "fall into the void" of no president, which he believed is what Syria wants. Nor would he like to see a compromise candidate as

president, nor another "Lahoud." He asked the delegation to "make Syria understand" that it cannot stop the Tribunal. Hariri believed that Bashar al-Asad does not understand that the tribunal is a bipartisan issue in the U.S. He believes that although House Speaker Pelosi gave a stern warning to Assad during her visit to Damascus, Asad used the visit as a public relations opportunity to strengthen his own position. Hariri then said that the result of Pelosi's warning to Asad was Fatah al-Islam. A new, strong president will begin a new era, and one, united voice warning Syria to stay out of Lebanon would also help.

MESSAGE FOR THE OPPOSITION

15. (C) Hariri said, in response to a question, that it will take at least six months to form the tribunal, and the results will take two to three years. However, the decision to establish the tribunal is the most important step. For now, Syria "won't even hear about it." He pointed at the recent explosions as a message to the UN Security Council to stop the tribunal. It might be that the bombs will allow Hizballah to say to Syria, "We have done what we can" to stop the tribunal. After the tribunal is established, Syria will be "humble." As for Nasrallah, he is a totally different person now. Nothing he says makes sense, as he tries to be the exporter of a revolution that the rest of the Arab world does not want. Hariri did not believe in the concept of a Shia Crescent; it is an Iranian idea. He believes that Iran is testing the waters in Lebanon; if it works here, they will export their concept to the Gulf. So far, Hariri claimed, Hizballah has won nothing. Iran and Hizballah are trying to create a new type of democracy, where the minority has a veto. This effort to cripple the country will not work. Hariri asked the delegation to point out to the opposition politicians their responsibilities; they must participate in the political system. He noted that when former PM Hariri was leader of the minority, he did not cripple the country. The fundamental difference between Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world is democracy, and it should be made clear to Aoun that, "Democracy is sacred!"

16. (U) This cable has not been cleared by the House Democracy Assistance Commission.
FELTMAN